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FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

Draft agreed conclusions submitted by the Vice-Chairperson Ljudmila Boskova (Bulgaria)

Women and the media

1. The Beijing Platform for Action identifies women and the media as one of the 12 critical areas of concern. As stated in the Beijing Platform for Action, gender stereotyping in advertising and the media is one of the factors of inequality that influences attitudes towards equality between women and men. Through a series of dialogues on the subject during its fortieth session, the Commission on the Status of Women examined measures to be used for increasing the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women. The conclusions emanating from the Commission's dialogue contain proposals for successful implementation of the strategic objectives and actions in the Platform for Action, taking into consideration the importance of implementing all the elements of the Platform.

I. RESPECT FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN, INCLUDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, AND THE MEDIA

2. The Commission on the Status of Women reconfirmed the importance it attached to the principles of freedom of expression and of freedom of the press and other means of communication. There was debate about freedom of expression from a gender perspective, in particular as it related to women's full enjoyment of freedom of expression, equal access to the media, balanced and diverse portrayals by the media of women and their multiple roles, and media information

aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women. Respect for the human rights of women, including freedom of expression, is a fundamental principle of the international community. In this regard, concern was also expressed about discrimination, threats and acts of violence against professional women in the field of information, including women journalists. If the goal of the full realization of the human rights of women, including freedom of expression, is to be achieved, human rights instruments must be applied in such a way as to take more clearly into consideration the systematic and systemic nature of discrimination against women that gender analysis has clearly indicated.

3. Relevant United Nations bodies, including the Commission on Human Rights and its mechanisms and procedures, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and independent expert bodies, should within their mandates further examine violations of the human rights of women, including freedom of opinion and freedom of expression, from a gender perspective, in cooperation with the Commission on the Status of Women within its mandate.

II. SELF-REGULATION, VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES AND RESPONSIVENESS TO CIVIL SOCIETY

4. The Platform for Action states that self-regulatory mechanisms by the media should be encouraged and, consistent with freedom of expression, should include the development of professional guidelines and codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation so as to eliminate gender-biased programming and to promote the presentation of non-stereotypical images of women and balanced and diverse portrayals of women and men.

5. In the context of responsiveness to civil society, self-regulation for public and private sector industries should be set within a framework of monitoring, awareness and education and well-developed and effective avenues for complaint. Such self-regulatory measures and voluntary guidelines should be established through a process of dialogue with media professionals, not by coercion.

6. With regard to the presentation of violence in the media, initiatives by Governments and other relevant actors, as appropriate, should be taken to raise awareness of the role of the media in promoting non-stereotyped images of women and men, as well as in eliminating patterns of media presentation that generate violence, and encouraging those responsible for media content to establish voluntary professional guidelines and codes of conduct and also raising awareness of the important role of the media in informing and educating people about the causes and effects of violence against women.

7. The following initiatives are among those which could be taken, as appropriate, consistent with the freedom of expression:

(a) Encourage the media to take part in international discussions, including the exchange of information and sharing of best practices on voluntary guidelines on a gender-balanced portrayal of women and men. Special attention should be given to the proliferation of transborder and global communications;

(b) Support and encourage women's equal participation in management, programming, education, training and research, including through positive action and equal opportunity policies, with the goal of achieving gender balance in all areas and at all levels of media work, as well as in the media advisory, regulatory and monitoring bodies.

III. THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF MEDIA EDUCATION

8. Media education, through, for example, practical workshops and training sessions, is an effective way to create greater awareness of gender stereotyping and equality issues among the general public, government, media industries and professionals.

9. In countries where major parts of the population, including many women, are illiterate or media illiterate, Governments should support the goal of providing appropriate education and training.

10. The civil society at large has an important role in exercising its influence on media content and stereotyped portrayal through consumer action and advocacy and different forms of media watch.

11. At the international level, an exchange of national experiences on media education and other measures can benefit legislators, national broadcasting authorities and media professionals.

IV. CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

12. The creation of a positive environment is a condition to promote measures intended to achieve a balanced portrayal of women and girls. Changes should be promoted in an enabling way and not through prescriptions. Ongoing research, including the establishment of indicators and monitoring, is important for assessing progress.

13. An enabling environment should also be created for women's media, including at the international level, such as the development of Womenwatch. The vital role of non-governmental organizations in media education, research, consumer advocacy and monitoring should be recognized and enhanced.

14. Media networks should be encouraged to make a commitment, or strengthen their commitment to gender equality. Public media, where they exist, should be encouraged to set an example for private media by their commitment and contribution to the advancement of women.

15. Governments should support research into all aspects of women and the media so as to define areas needing attention and action, as well as review existing media policies with a view to integrating a gender perspective.

16. To the extent consistent with freedom of expression, Governments should take effective measures or institute such measures, including appropriate

legislation against pornography and the projection of violence against women and children in the media.

V. WOMEN AND GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

17. Advances in information technology have opened up boundaries. The role of women in global communication networks needs to be strengthened. Barriers to such information technology and to women's involvement at every level of its development should be reduced.